

## 9.25.08: Turning Gold Into Lead

### Turning Gold Into Lead

By Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi

“You can fool some of the people all the time&rdquo;, but the 90-day-late budget deal should fool no one. It is totally irresponsible and goes against California&rsquo;s values of prioritizing high quality public education, investing in research, fostering entrepreneurs, and caring for the less fortunate in our communities.

At a time when we are confronted with strong international business competition, growing unemployment numbers, shocking high school drop-out rates, and rapidly climbing numbers of uninsured children and employees, we need our government to start fixing some of these long-term problems now. This year&rsquo;s budget compromise fails to address these challenges and therefore puts our states&rsquo; future at even greater risk.

This budget continues the slow starvation diet that has crippled our education system. The dropout rate in our high schools has reached 25% and higher in some areas. Our schools continue to drop in national ranking. Instead of investing in our children and expanding educational opportunity, this budget does not even keep up with inflation and school enrollment growth. Teachers will be laid off, class sizes will increase, and any chance of progressive reform will be further hampered. This budget starves the minds of our future workforce by continuing the trend of decreased investments in higher education. In 1990, the state spent an average of \$15,000 per pupil at the University of California. By 2007, that number dropped to \$10,000 per pupil. Meanwhile California spends \$57,114 dollars on each prisoner. Our priorities are seriously mixed up.

This budget literally starves the health of Californians - especially our children. It is estimated that more than 250,000 children currently receiving healthcare through the Healthy Families Program will lose coverage, adding to the ranks of 6.5 million people without coverage today. Despite political spin, the compromise does not solve the structural deficit. It does not balance expenditures with real cash revenues. Using gimmicks instead of structural reform, the budget succeeds in &ldquo;kicking the can down the road&rdquo; and setting California up for an even worse fiscal crisis in just a matter of months. This budget, with its one-time fines and accounting tricks, coupled with out-year unwarranted tax breaks for huge conglomerate corporations, guarantees an even bigger deficit in the future.

If we are to guide our great state out of this fiscal crisis, we must re-establish the successful California tradition of investing in both the public and private sectors, for today and tomorrow. We must restore our education system to the best in the nation by demanding efficiencies and effectiveness at all levels and increasing investment when we achieve positive results. Our economic survival demands that we have the highly skilled workers and professionals needed to remain competitive in the global marketplace.

As unemployment climbs to 7.7 percent in California, a jobs solution can be found in the new energy economy. At the current pace, the demand for skilled and highly educated workers in the next two decades will grow far faster than the projected labor force. Investing in the training and education for these jobs today will help meet the demands of our economy in the future, while simultaneously addressing today&rsquo;s unemployment.

We must resume our tradition of investing public funds into our world class higher education system. Both CSU and UC will require a minimum additional investment of \$1.2 billion to return to the 1990 level of state support for students. As we restore funds we must demand and get real accountability and improved efficiency from both systems. We must advance and promote research at our universities to allow new ideas and innovation to fuel our economic growth. We must unshackle the innovation of our entrepreneurs and venture capitalists and foster a successful small business climate.

We must also invest in the health of Californians. Today, well over six million Californians are uninsured. Dozens of emergency rooms and hospitals have been shut down and all across the state, sick children, seniors, and countless members of our workforce do not receive the care they need to return to health, stay healthy and be productive in our economy.

The crises in education, the economy and health care are matched by a crisis in government. Gridlock, inaction and gross partisanship stifle the ability of the public sector to achieve successful partnerships with the private sector that create economic growth and social advancement. Constitutional requirements and budgeting restrictions have created an unworkable governmental system. Term limits, flawed redistricting, a 2/3rds voting requirement that establishes minority rule on budgets and taxes, conflicting governmental systems and more, all lead to the problems confronting California today. A constitutional convention may be necessary to create a new, vibrant and workable government.

California the Golden State, long known as the land of opportunity, education, innovation and community values is refusing to fund critical investments for our today and tomorrow. If we continue on this path, we will turn the alchemists dream on its head, by turning gold into lead.